

Top tips for writing feature articles

A feature story differs from a straight news story in one respect – its intent. A news story provides information about an event, idea or situation. The feature does a bit more – it may also interpret news, add depth and colour to a story, instruct or entertain.

Structure :

- The **introduction** is the most important part - entice your reader, hook them in. Use drama, emotion, quotations, questions, descriptions
- The **body** of the article needs to keep any promises or answer any questions raised in the introduction - try and maintain an "atmosphere" throughout the writing
- While the introduction draws the reader in, the **conclusion** should be written to help the reader remember the story - use a strong punchline

Some points to keep in mind:

- Focus on human interest - the feel and emotion you put into the article are critical. Don't think about writing a "science" story - think about writing a "human interest" story.
- Be clear about why you are writing the article. Is it to inform, persuade, observe, evaluate, or evoke emotion?
- Write in the active voice. In active writing, people **do** things. Passive sentences often have the person doing the action at the end of the sentence or things being done "by" someone.
- Accuracy is important - you can interpret and embroider but not fudge.
- Keep your audience clearly in mind - what are their desires, what really matters to them?
- Avoid clichés (cutting edge, world beating, revolutionary) and sentimental statements - especially at the end of your article.
- Interviews for features usually need to be in-depth and in person rather than over the phone - this enables you to add in colour and detail.
- Use anecdotes and direct quotes to tell the story - try not to use too many of your own words.
- Talk to more than one person to provide a more complete picture – but don't just add in sources to show how much work you've done. Be ruthless about who you put in and who you leave out!
- Don't rely on the computer spell-checker - especially those with a U.S. dictionary.
- Decide on the 'tense' of your story at the start and stick to it. Present tense usually works best.
- Avoid lengthy, complex paragraphs. Your article will appear in columns, so one or two sentences equals a paragraph.
- Ideas come from everywhere - watch, read, listen, keep up to date, take notes. Talk to people outside the field of science to find out what interests and concerns them.

Getting your feature articles published

- READ the publication you want to write for (a surprising number of writers don't and it shows)
- Give a proposal rather than full article
- Include good examples of your previously published work

- Write what the editor wants to publish, not what you want to write. How do you find out? Study the editorial and staff writers' pieces - they are aimed precisely at the publication's target audience
- Select your market - list six magazines that could buy your article and study them. The articles, advertising and letters to the editor will give vital clues to the interests and demographics of the audience
- A picture sells the story - offer good quality images as prints, transparencies or digital files. Check with the editor for the preferred option
- Obtain a style sheet for the publication
- Submit your story typed and double-spaced.
- Let the relevant person (editor/deputy editor) in the print media outlet know you are sending them an article. Follow this up with a phone call a week or so later
- Send your article to only one print media outlet initially. If they don't want to use it within a set time period, send it elsewhere